

# China's Model of Multilateralism: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Xi Jinping's Speech on Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

Emilia Kurniasari  
{emilia.kurniasari01@ui.ac.id}

Universitas Indonesia, Indonesia

**Abstract:** In the last few decades, multilateralism has faced challenges due to various global crises, such as the current Covid-19 pandemic. One of the countries that considers multilateralism as a solution to global problems is China. China's growing multilateral activism was initially perceived as China's integration and support to the current dominant global multilateral order, but there is also another view that China's multilateral participation is a threat because of its different characteristics. In its narrative, the Chinese government often emphasizes the ineffective existing multilateral institutions and international system and both need to be improved. In 2013, China initiated a multilateral development bank called the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) which is claimed as a solution to these problems. However, it is not a necessity to solve the ineffectiveness of multilateral institutions and the international system by establishing new institution. This makes the establishment of the AIIB can be seen as a social irregularity. This study aims to understand this social irregularity by analyzing President Xi Jinping's speech at the fifth annual AIIB meeting in 2020. The speech will be analyzed using the three dimensions of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) method, the text dimension, the discursive process dimension, and the sociocultural dimension. This study argues that there is ideological aspect behind the establishment of AIIB. Although Xi claimed that AIIB is a fully international institution, Xi's thought, which is "Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era", is identified as the ideological aspect behind the speech.

**Keywords:** China, Multilateralism, AIIB, Critical Discourse Analysis

## 1 Introduction

Multilateralism is one of the most studied phenomena in the field of international relations. There have been multilateral institutions that have been established under the auspices of the United Nations (UN), the World Bank Group, Multilateral Development Banks (MDBs), vertical funding, etc since 1944 and has been useful in various fields, such as economics, social, education, and health [1]. In recent decades, multilateralism and global governance have been dealing with some pressures. Several events that marked challenges for multilateralism including the 1997-1998 Asian financial crisis, the 2008 global financial crisis, the "Brexit" in Europe, the US withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and the Paris Agreement, as well as the tariff war between the US and China which had an impact on the global economy on investment and regional trade (Prakash, 2019). To deal with these challenges, the leaders of countries at the G20 Summit in Hamburg in 2017 have made efforts

in the form of a joint commitment to foster self-confidence and achieve strong, sustainable, and balanced economic growth by increasing cooperation between multilateral institutions (Prakash, 2019).

According to Keohane [2], multilateralism is a practice of coordinating national policies in groups of three or more countries. Ruggie [3] argued that the peculiarity of multilateralism is the certain general principles agreed by the countries. Ruggie [3] added that there are two consequences arising from successful multilateralism, indivisibility and diffused reciprocity among members. Both definitions of multilateralism from Keohane and Ruggie complement each other. Keohane emphasized the quantitative aspect, while Ruggie added the qualitative aspect. In summary, multilateralism is the practice of coordinating three or more countries based on certain general principles in the relations between countries within them. In the practice of multilateralism, there are at least four underlying principles, namely inclusiveness and equality, non-intervention, collaboration, and upholding as well as respecting the international legal order.

One of the countries that strongly encourages multilateralism is China. China has often emphasized its commitment to multilateralism as an effective measure to maintain peace and promote world development. China, which in the 1950s and 1970s tended to be closed due to its Maoist-inclined ideology and disputes with bordering countries [4], started to open up and join various international institutions and regimes after the Reform and Openness (改革开放 *gaige kaifang*) policy in Deng Xiaoping era in the late of 1970s (Li, 2011). In the 1980s and 1990s, China's foreign policy began to change and its role in global governance increased, including cooperation with international institutions. At the regional level, for instance, China has been increasingly strengthening its multilateral relations with the Asian region as well as enhancing bilateral relations with ASEAN- led multilateral institutions. China, which was passive in multilateralism, has now become more active and plays a constructive role multilaterally.

However, China's participation in multilateralism is also much debated. On the one hand, Chinese activism is seen as positive because it shows China's attitude to integrate with the current dominant multilateral order, which is based on a rules-based order. On the other hand, China's practice in the multilateral mechanism as a whole does not represent full integration into the liberal multilateral order. China's involvement in global multilateralism is seen as guided by pragmatism to support its interests rather than a grand vision (Li, 2011)[5]. China is also anticipated as a revisionist power that wants to increase its leverage and adjust the rules of the current international system according to its wishes [6].

In World Economic Forum (WEF) 2017 and 2021, President Xi Jinping emphasized multilateralism is important as a solution to the current challenges of economic globalization. Because the world's problems are getting more complicated, Xi Jinping said that the only way to solve them is to encourage multilateralism and build a “community with a shared future for mankind” (人类命运共同体 *renlei mingyun gongtong ti*). China's multilateralism discourse such as “community with shared future for mankind” has also been raised by Xi Jinping in his speech before the Indonesian parliament and at the 2013 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum in Bali. On both occasions, Xi also conveyed his ideas on the initiative to establish a multilateral development bank called the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). AIIB was established in order to encourage sustainable economic development by encouraging infrastructure development of poor and developing countries, especially in the Asian region [7]. The establishment of the AIIB became a new starting point for China's multilateral activism because it was the first multilateral development bank established by China as well as a non- Western developing country. In a speech on the first day of the

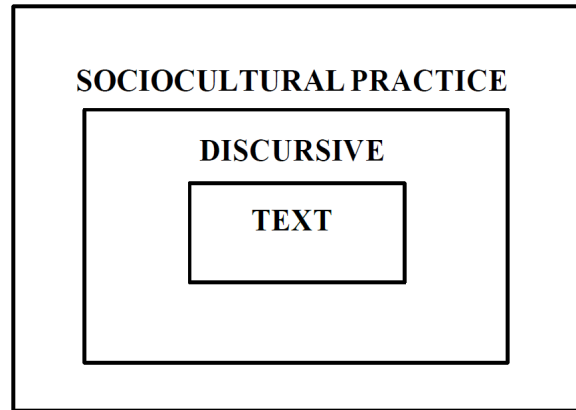
AIIB's operation, Xi Jinping, on behalf of China, stated that the current global economic governance system needed to be changed. In another speech at the AIIB fifth annual meeting in 2020, Xi Jinping demonstrated China's commitment to making the AIIB a qualified multilateral institution for world development. According to the statements by Chinese government officials, the AIIB is an important tool to realize "community with shared future for mankind".

China seems to be trying to reshape multilateralism and challenge the post-Cold War multilateral order with liberal principles that have dominated the world [8]. The discourse of "community with shared future for mankind" often appears in tandem with China's narrative of multilateralism, especially about the AIIB. This indicates that the AIIB is one of the important initial platforms for China in promoting its view on multilateralism. Meanwhile, there are still many multilateral institutions that have the similar concern on global economic challenges, such as International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other regional institution like Asian Development Bank (ADB). If China's intention is only to improve the current global economic system, it is not a necessity to establish new institution, China could just encourage its perspective through existing multilateral institution. This study attempts to understand China's view on multilateralism according to this social irregularity as well as to figure out whether this social irregularity is necessary or not.

## 2 Method

This study uses Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to analyze China's view on multilateralism. Fairclough sees discourse as a social practice [9]. According to Fairclough, there are several reasons that make discourse analysis important. First, discourse shapes and is shaped by society. Second, discourse helps in shaping and transforming knowledge, social relations, and social identity. Third, discourse is related to ideology and is shaped by power relations. Fourth, discourse represents the condition of the tug-of-war for power.

CDA contains three dimensions, text dimension, discursive practice dimension, and sociocultural practice dimension [10]. Text dimension refers to speech, writing, graphics, and their combination or all of the linguistic forms of the text and considers several aspects including the meaning of words, terms, grammar, themes, and cohesion. Discursive practice dimension refers to the process of interpreting text by linking the production and consumption of texts. The discursive practice dimension aims to see the extent to which statements can encourage affirmative action or power. There have been attempts to interpret and figure out the intertextuality between texts in the discursive practice dimension. The last dimension is sociocultural practice. This stage indicates that the text is shaped by the social praxis behind it and the social praxis of the actor himself.



**Fig. 1.** Three Dimensions of Norman Fairclough's Critical Discourse Analysis (Haryatmoko [10])

Using these three dimensions of CDA by Norman Fairclough, this study will analyze Xi Jinping's speech in 2020 at the fifth annual meeting of the AIIB. The speech in 2020 was chosen because after five years, China's multilateralism perspective through the AIIB should have been better formed and better prepared for further development. The year 2020 is also considered because in this year, Covid-19 pandemic, the current global challenge that also has an impact on global economy was at its peak in many countries. The effectiveness of multilateral institutions existence can usually be seen when there are global problems, such as the Asian economic crisis and the previous global economic crisis. This period is the right time to prove whether AIIB can deal with the global situation and make the world better.

### **3 Discussion**

#### **3.1 Text Dimension**

According to the first paragraph, Xi Jinping delivered this speech on behalf of People's Republic of China and himself. Moreover, Xi highlighted the global economic problem as mentioned below:

解决经济全球化进程中出现的矛盾，各国应该努力形成更加包容的全球治理、更加有效的多边机制、更加积极的区域合作。

*To address issues emerging in the course of economic globalization, countries should pursue more inclusive global governance, more effective multilateral institutions, and more robust regional cooperation.*

According to the statement above, Xi emphasized that global governance, multilateral institutions, and regional cooperation need to be improved. Xi Jinping used the word 更加 *geng jia* which means "more" several times. At the same time, Xi also tried to convince participants, which are the AIIB members, by claiming that AIIB is in line with international standard of existing multilateral institution:

4年多来，亚投行按照多边开发银行模式和原则运作，坚持国际性、规范性、高标准，实现良好开局。

*In the ensuing four years or more, the AIIB has followed the operating model and principles of multilateral development banks and acted as a truly international, rule-based and high-standard institution.* Furthermore, Xi emphasized the high-quality of AIIB as a multilateral institution by stating the more friends and partners they gained.

To get a better analysis in the text dimension, NVivo software is used to categorize the words in the speech and understand the connections between them. In the context of multilateralism, there are two words mainly mentioned in this text, those are ‘发展 *fazhan*’ or ‘develop’ and ‘造成 *zaocheng*’ or ‘create’. These two words indicate that China’s intention towards global multilateralism is to give some developments by establishing AIIB. According to the speech, Xi mainly highlighted the global economic problem which is the global economic problem caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Xi also highlighted the importance of ‘community with shared future for mankind’ spirit to solve global economic problem caused by the pandemic.

全球抗击新冠肺炎疫情的实践表明，人类是休戚与共、风雨同舟的命运共同体

*The global response to COVID-19 has made it clear that mankind rise and fall together in a community with a shared future*

Up to the text dimension, it can be concluded that China considers multilateralism as an important tool to solve global challenges. However, the existing multilateral institutions need to be improved. According to this speech, the problem highlighted is global economic problem caused by Covid-19 pandemic. The words that mainly used in the speech, such as ‘develop’ and ‘create’, indicate that for China, improvement means to give something new to the international system which is realized by establishing AIIB.

### **3.2 Discursive Practice Dimension**

According to text dimension, it is clear that the most two words appeared in the speech are ‘develop’ and ‘create’. Both words indicate something new, whether to compliment or to change as a whole. Moreover, Xi Jinping emphasizes four points for the future AIIB:

- 1) 第一，聚焦共同发展，把亚投行打造成推动全球共同发展的新型多边开发银行。

*First, let us aim at development for all and make the AIIB a new type of multilateral development bank that promotes development across the world.*

- 2) 第二，勇于开拓创新，把亚投行打造成与时俱进的新型发展实践平台。

*Second, let us keep breaking new ground and make the AIIB a new type of development platform progressing with the times.*

- 3) 第三，创造最佳实践，把亚投行打造成高标准的新国际合作机构。

*Third, let us strive for excellence and make the AIIB a new type of high-performance institution for international cooperation.*

4) 第四，坚持开放包容，把亚投行打造成国际多边合作新典范。

*Fourth, let us stay open and inclusive and make the AIIB a new paradigm of multilateral cooperation.*

Each point contains the same word, 新 *xin* or “new”. Considering that the speech is delivered by President Xi Jinping, which especially represented Chinese government, this word actually contains an ideological aspect. In 2017, Xi legalized his thought 新时代中国特色社会主义思想 *xin shidai zhongguo tese shehui zhuyi sixiang* or “Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for the New Era” to be implemented together with Marxism-Leninism as well as China former leaders’ thoughts [11].

### **3.3 Sociocultural Practice Dimension**

The last paragraph of Xi Jinping’s speech [12] is quite representing the sociocultural dimension of China’s multilateralism view. Xi emphasized China’s position as a supporter for AIIB according to global situations and challenges.

中国始终支持多边主义、践行多边主义，以开放、合作、共赢精神同世界各国共谋发展。中国将继续同各成员一道支持亚投行、办好亚投行，为国际社会应对风险挑战、实现共同发展作出更大贡献。希望亚投行不负使命、不负时代、不负众托。

*China always supports and adheres to multilateralism, and pursues development with the rest of the world in the spirit of openness and mutually-beneficial cooperation. China will continue working with other members to support the AIIB and make it a success, and contribute more to the global response to risks and challenges and the pursuit of shared development. I hope the AIIB will live up to its mission and our expectations and prove worthy of our times.*

However, as mentioned in the discursive practice dimension, Xi Jinping tried to propose his thought in international system through AIIB. It is absolutely possible for Xi Jinping to bring his thought into AIIB since this multilateral institution was proposed by China. Moreover, China’s international power has been stronger considering its current global economic position.

## **4 Conclusion**

According to the speech delivered by Xi Jinping, China actually wants to bring something new in global multilateralism because of the global challenges occurred such as Covid-19 pandemic. It is clear with the use of words such as “develop”, “create”, and “new”. Meanwhile, although Xi claims that the AIIB is fully international as a multilateral institution, the ideological aspect of his thought, which is Socialism with Chinese Characteristics do the New Era, remains inseparable. According to the CDA method, one of the important things is

intertextuality, which means more texts are needed. This study only analyzes one speech and is still in the initial stage of the whole research being carried out. This study will continue to develop until it can identify the intertextuality and present a more thorough interpretation.

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